Olga Baranova

The Path from Lawyer to Writer

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Оглавление

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Prologue. The Notebook

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In every home where history lives, there are guardian objects. Not museum exhibits behind glass, but witnesses, warm from human touch. In Olga's parents' house, such a thing was an old box. It sat on the top shelf of the bookcase in the living room, between volumes of Pasternak and legal commentaries. Children and grandchildren knew: don't touch it. It's Mom's. It's Grandma's. It's the beginning.

Inside the box, beneath a layer of dried lavender, lay a notebook. Not the velvet one — the first one had disappeared somewhere amid the chaos of moves. But a simple one, with a cardboard cover the colour of faded ochre, its pages yellowed with time. On the first page, in ink, in her earliest adult handwriting, it read: «Poems. For me only.»

And below, in pencil, many years later, in another, weary and wise hand: «It all started here. And it all came back here. O.»

This notebook isn't just a collection of youthful verses. It's a map of the terrain where an entire life will unfold. Here, between the naive lines about the «first snowstorm» and the «lonely streetlamp,» the main nerve of Olga's entire future story is already beating: the painful, beautiful rupture between the world as it is and the world it could be. Between the paragraph and the stanza.

On the margins are entirely different notes. Short, terse entries made by her father, the judge, during her law school years: «Art. 15 — pay attention to the contradiction with practice!»; «Good thought, but it needs argumentation.» And to the side, in her mother's hand: «What a precise metaphor. It makes my heart ache.» Two universes were already having a quiet dialogue in the margins of her life. The universe of logic, duty, clear boundaries, and the universe of feeling, music, and boundless inner space.

One page in the notebook stood out. It wasn't filled with poems. It bore a чернильный ink sketch — a plan, a scheme: «My future life.» Arrows, boxes, age markers: 21 — university graduation; 23 — marriage; 24 — first child. Everything was clear, rational, safe. Like a building blueprint. And then, cutting right across this scheme like a bolt of lightning, was one

phrase, written in the same ink, but later, with such pressure that it nearly tore the paper: «BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SOUL?»

These two spontaneous, desperate words are the key to everything. They're the dull thud of a heart that precedes an earthquake. They're the first quiet cry of that very «quiet storm» that began brewing in a ten-year-old girl.

This story isn't about becoming famous. Although fame will come. It isn't about finding and losing love. Although love will be the centre of her life and her deepest wound. And it isn't even about choosing between calling and duty — in the end, she'll prove that true calling is the highest duty a person owes to themselves.

This is a story about the power of the inner voice that cannot be silenced by any, even the most correct, life scripts. About how the «storm» that matured in the silence of a child's soul one day crashes over the carefully constructed landscape of life, washing away false landmarks and exposing the solid, real bedrock. About how a «boulder of disappointment» can become a precious crystal around which a diamond grows.

About a journey that begins with the question «Who am I supposed to be?» and ends with the realisation «Who I am.» About a metamorphosis where a lawyer becomes a poet, where the mask becomes the face, where loss turns into gain, and the most terrible pain becomes the source of the purest strength.

And all of this is already here, in this simple notebook. In this childish but so serious dialogue of two handwritings in the margins. In this naive scheme pierced by a cry of the soul. The story has already begun. It's waiting for us to turn the page.

Because every great life is, in essence, a book. With a prologue written by the stars and the family. With chapters full of intrigue, victories, and defeats. With love stories that may break off mid-sentence. And with an epilogue written by others — those who remain, and those who have heard.

This is Olga's story. About a woman who found herself after losing everything, and gained everything by finding herself. It's about how our true fate isn't what's predestined for us, but what we dare to live.

Open the notebook. Listen to the wind between the lines. The story begins.

Part 1. Between the Paragraph and the Stanza

Olga was born under a lucky star, in a warm, intellectual family where comfort, respect, and love reigned. Her older brother wasn't so much a rival as her first protector and most devoted fan. Childhood was like sunlight filtering through leaves: serene and filled with fairy tales her mother read and discussions of justice her father led. The world was safe and predictable.

But at the age of ten, a different, quiet storm began to brew in this harmonious universe. The girl discovered that words could not only describe the world but also create their own, full of secret meanings and unspoken feelings. These experiments began with naive rhymes about animals and the weather, recorded in a beautiful velvet notebook — her first secret diary. The poems were her private territory, an island of inner life that didn't yet need citizenship in the adult world.

Life, however, dictated its own scenarios. After graduating from school, Olga, not without the influence of family traditions — her father was a respected judge — enrolled in law school. Law is also a kind of poetry, she thought, the poetry of logic and justice. She immersed herself in the world of codes, and she liked it. Reason took precedence over feeling.

Her career started successfully. The young, promising lawyer was valued for her sharp mind and impeccable argumentation. The world of law seemed as clear to her as a chessboard, where every move could be calculated. But fate had an unscripted move in store.

It was in the court corridors, smelling of dust and anxiety, that she met him. His name was Roman. Their eyes met as he entered the courtroom.

Their romance was like a flash of lightning in a clear sky — dazzling, deafening, and utterly unexpected. It wasn't just sympathy; it was a meeting of two kindred universes. After gruelling days in court, they spent hours in small cafes, arguing about Kafka and Tsvetaeva, laughing at the absurdity of some cases, sharing their dreams. He was like her: with a razor-sharp intellect, but with a poet's soul hidden beneath a formal suit. He was the first in years to ask:

«Show me your poems.»

And she, holding her breath, did. He read them in silence, then said quietly:

«You're not doing what you're meant to do. Your element isn't articles of codes, but this wind between the lines.»

They adorned each other's time. A dawn trip to the river while the city

still slept. Walks in the rain without an umbrella, because laughter warmed better than any coat. He gave her not flowers, but old, rare books with notes in the margins, and they found whole messages in them. She wrote him lines she wasn't ashamed of — passionate, tender, full of the admission that he had awakened that very girl with the notebook inside her. This was a love-revelation, a love-mirror in which she saw her most authentic self.

But lightning, as we know, strikes the highest point and vanishes. Its end was as sharp and inexplicable as its beginning. There was no quarrel or drama. Just one day, the realisation came that their shared universe, so bright, was too fragile for the pressure of the outside world — ambitions, career obligations, fear of that all-consuming depth. He stepped back, dissolved, leaving behind not the ashes of burned bridges, but a cold, heavy boulder of disappointment. A boulder in which all their conversations, promises, and the image of her true self — the one he had seen and let go — were frozen.

Part 2. A New Life

To escape the cold of shattered hopes, Olga instinctively, like an animal seeking shelter, rushed to build a proper life. One that could be understood, laid out point by point, and defended in the court of common sense. She married another man, who gave her roses on holidays and never asked about her poems. She gave birth to a beautiful daughter, and then a son. She built a home where everything had its place.

Their life resembled a well-designed, solid house in a classic style. It had no whimsical turrets of romantic illusions, but it did have a solid foundation, symmetrical facades, and warm, even heating. It was life by protocol, where the chief virtues were predictability, order, and a sense of duty fulfilled.

Her husband, Sergei, wasn't a man of mystery, but a man of solutions. His love was expressed not in spontaneous declarations or attempts to understand the depths of her soul, but in tangible, socially approved actions: roses on 8 March and her birthday, expensive perfume for their anniversary, a family vacation once a year at the seaside. He never asked about the poems not because he was insensitive, but because he considered it her private, perhaps frivolous, territory, one he shouldn't intrude upon, just as she didn't intrude on his work matters.

Their home truly was a place where everything was in its place —

literally and figuratively.

Wake up at seven. Breakfast, where the scrambled eggs or oatmeal were always perfect. He reads the news on his tablet; she packs the children's things. In the evening, a three-course dinner (soup, main dish, salad). Saturday — cleaning; Sunday — a visit to his parents or a trip to the shopping centre for necessary items. The furniture was quality, from a good store, in a style of classic modernity. Nothing superfluous, nothing that broke the overall harmonious image. The bookshelves were neat: his technical literature, her once-purchased but rarely reread poetry collections, children's encyclopedias, bestsellers in glossy covers.

Their conversations over dinner resembled a daily operational meeting: about the children's school successes, the upcoming renovation, choosing a new car, a visit to the dentist. The topics were safe, practical, and didn't require laying bare the soul. If arguments happened, they weren't over jealousy, unspoken grievances, or misunderstandings, but over broken agreements: he stayed late at work without warning; she spent the budget on something he considered irrational.

The birth of a beautiful daughter, and then a son, became the culmination and main justification for the chosen path. Olga threw herself into motherhood with the same zealous care she used to build her household. The children were always well cared for, fed wholesome food, enrolled in the best clubs and sections in their town. The family albums bulged with evidence of idyll: happy faces against the backdrop of Christmas trees, seas, and school celebrations. The children were her main outlet and meaning, perhaps the only ones to whom she sang lullabies and read fairy tales with her almost forgotten intonation.

In this ideal life, there was a quiet but constant meteorology of the soul.

The cold of shattered hopes stayed outside. She felt warm, protected from life's storms. This wasn't happiness-ecstasy, but happiness-calm.

Sometimes, most often late at night, when the children were asleep and Sergei was watching TV, she might stand at the window, looking at the moon, and a wave of a silent question would rise inside her. But it wasn't about her husband or the children. It was about that Olga who could have been, about the poems that hadn't been written, about the passion that could have burned everything to ashes. She quickly quenched this wave, straightened the curtain, and went to make tea for her husband.

She was proud of her home, her children, her ability to keep everything under control. But sometimes, when accepting another bouquet as a gift, she caught herself thinking that she saw in the roses not a symbol of love, but a symbol of an account. Everything was right. Everything was protected. And that could become unbearably cramped.

Their marriage wasn't a prison, but a voluntary, well-appointed fortress. Olga herself had drawn its plan, herself raised its walls. Sergei was a reliable ally in this construction. Together, they created a world that had everything for life — except, perhaps, that elusive air that poetry breathes: risk, unpredictability, wild beauty, and wounding truth. But from that air, she had once decided, you could freeze to death.

So Olga lived by schedule; life was calm and measured, until trouble came again from where it wasn't invited. The news came of her grandmother's death, her beloved grandmother. She had been her only loyal friend, a silent witness to her life. Only to her grandmother did Olga tell everything and receive comfort. They loved to drink tea together with apple jam that her grandmother had canned. Olga had never tasted anything better than that jam.

Grandma was quiet, but not empty. Her silence was full, accepting. She didn't give advice of the «you should» variety, didn't ask about Sergei's salary or the children's grades. She sat in her old but cosy armchair, knitting endless socks, and listened. Simply listened. And in that listening, Olga could voice everything: a momentary annoyance with her husband, a silly fear, a flash of inexplicable melancholy, and the old, never-healing pain of those shattered hopes. Grandma would nod, adjust her glasses, and say something like: «Life, Olya, it's wider than it seems. It's like my ball of yarn — you pull a thread, and there's a whole story there.» She was the last guardian of the true Olga, the one from before the proper life.

It happened in March — a time when the world splits in two: from above, the spring sun is already dripping; underfoot, there's still the raw, dirty, cold trace of winter. It was on such a day that the call came. Not from Grandma, but from Olga's father. «Ol, Grandma died,» he said quietly.

Olga's world didn't collapse. It fell silent. The sound of the washing machine, the TV announcer's voice, the children's laughter — everything became flat and meaningless, like a silent movie. She physically felt that the last living thread connecting her to her own soul had snapped. There was no longer that one person before whom she didn't have to be proper,

successful, strong. When Sergei found out, he hugged her and said:

«Pull yourself together, dear. We need to go.»

And she pulled herself together. Automatically, as always.

The funeral was as dual as the March day.

In the morning, a nasty drizzle fell. It didn't pour, but sifted, penetrating under umbrellas, behind collars, dropping icy droplets onto faces. The cemetery ground was sticky, black, hopeless mud where heels sank.

Everything went off properly and decorously. There were wreaths with inscriptions «To our beloved Grandma,» handshakes, quiet condolences from relatives, a reception at a café. Olga, in a black coat, stood like a monument, responding with nods. But her inner gaze was fixed on details that suddenly became enormous: on Grandma's old dressing gowns hanging in the hallway; on the jar of half-eaten jam in the fridge, which would now stand there forever as a relic; on the unfinished sock on the table.

When they began to lower the coffin into the dank March pit, and the mud began to hit the lid with a dull thud, Olga was finally overwhelmed. Not with hysteria, but with blinding, frightening clarity. She suddenly realised that she wasn't only burying her grandmother. She was burying the last witness to her real life. The one who knew her before Sergei, before the children, before the house where everything was in its place. Now that Olga — the young, passionate, vulnerable one who believed in poems — would no longer have anyone to remember her. She would die definitively. And only this woman in the black coat, with the perfectly organised funeral, would remain.

At the wake, they served tea. Olga mechanically put a spoonful of store-bought apple jam from a small plastic packet into her glass. She took a sip. It wasn't a taste. It was a parody, emptiness, sweet water. It was at that moment, through the contrast of the wretched, alien taste, that the fullness of her loss flooded her. She got up from the table, went out to the dank March courtyard of the café, leaned against the cold wall, and finally wept — silently, shuddering all over, feeling the icy March dampness penetrate through the soles of her shoes straight into her heart.

From that March day, a crack appeared in her perfectly structured life. Not catastrophic, but permanent. Quiet melancholy turned into a phantom pain for the lost world, the only key to which was now a taste that no longer existed. And the ticking of the kitchen clock, marking her

impeccable schedule, began to sound a little louder and more insistent, reminding her of another time — one that now flowed in only one direction.

Her body, that silent witness to inner storms, rebelled. At first, there were warning signs she attributed to the fatigue of a young mother and lawyer: rapid heartbeat, as if a little motor was running inside forever, trembling in her fingers when she tried to fasten the tiny button on Matvey's cardigan, inexplicable weight loss despite exhausting appetite. Then came insomnia, when even deadening fatigue couldn't overcome the nervous vigilance of her body. The world became too sharp, the light too bright, her own emotions uncontrollable.

The diagnoses, delivered almost simultaneously, sounded like a sentence to her attempt to control everything: thy